

Rental Rag August 2002

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We can congratulate ourselves! We've made it through one crazy first half of a year - and I'm sure that we still have some surprises ahead! If we stay focused, we can stay above this crazy market and all the negative, scandal ridden news that has been surrounding us. As the economy is starting to turn upwards, let's be there! Meanwhile, we need to keep asking: What can we do better now?

Note that we have Vendors' night coming up August 21 in Hackensack. I hope to see lots of us there to check out vendor specials and to visit with friends and other rental operators- and Murray Vale promises us a culinary delites!

Then in October, we have an unusual program coming up with your suppliers as the main focus (a caterer and a contractor)- what do your suppliers want, and expect, from a rental store?

Your board has been discussing the feasibility of a Regional Rentech program- subject to be determined. It would be a 1-2 day educational program of general interest. Keep your eyes open for more details.

Megan Holt Jones (our VP) and Matt Holt have checked out Anaheim in light of our next ARA convention.. Megan is chairing the Tents and Events portion of the convention and is looking for an exciting and successful program! I hear that the convention area has gone through a total makeover!

Vendors will be interested in the new advertising program available in the Rental Rag. Details on page 7.

I hope that you all are having a good and successful summer!

Howard Heller

POP....The Power of Party" Events & Tents

The power of knowledge and the power of training will come together in Anaheim next February, as an all-new Events & Tents conference brings attendees "The Power of Party."

The program, designed specifically for those in event and party rental, is Feb. 8-9, just prior to the A.R.A. Annual Convention and Rental Trade Show on Feb. 10-13.

"With the exciting changes to the Annual Convention and the renovations in the Anaheim area, the events committee wanted to capture that spirit too. And change is always good.

"Plus we're introducing a new brand identity to Events & Tents with The Power of Party that captures the 'pop' of the industry."

In addition to the new identity, Events & Tents also includes a revamped structure. The program will

include the following:

" The popular event industry tours move to the afternoon of Saturday, Feb. 8, to jump start Events & Tents 2003. Watch for more details on the tour location coming soon.

" A dynamic opening session on Saturday evening presented by Sue Hershkowitz-Coore, an Events & Tents favorite, followed by a networking cocktail reception.

" A full day of educational sessions on Sunday, Feb. 9, featuring four educational tracks: event logistics/design, sales/management, tenting and warehousing/ operations.

" An encore with Sue Hershkowitz-Coore on Sunday, as she presents a closing session in the afternoon.
" Event logistics/design track participants will coordinate the cocktail reception prior to the Rental Product Premier on Monday, Feb. 10, a Convention kickoff that will showcase new products at the 2003 trade show.

"Whether you've been to a previous Events & Tents program or not, coming to Anaheim is only going to benefit you. "This is the only place to gain specific knowledge on event rental that will increase your business, to exchange ideas with your industry peers from throughout the world and to get energized by the dynamic interaction throughout the weekend."

Watch for more information and registration details on Events & Tents 2003 coming by mail in September and to the A.R.A. web site at www.ararental.org.

This is a preview of an article to be released in the Sept Rental Management issue. NJ You got it first!

The on site meeting was great. The area really has improved. No traffic barrels, road blocks, back hoes and dirt! It's clean, easy to get around and we had a great time at Disney's California Experience. A new theme park dedicated to California sights. I highly recommend the In Flight Ride. You hang glide around the state seeing some awesome sights.

We also went to the Back Lot, a take off on Hollywood. The Wednesday night's ARA Disney Experience event will be here.

We visited several possibilities for the store tour and my favorite was RWB party props. Located in Orange in an old Orange warehouse. Was Way Cool!

If you love Mexican Food as I do, go to Los Sanchos. You won't find it in the dining guides. It's a hole in the wall across from Target when you make a right off of West Convention Way. Awesome food, just don't order any thing not cooked, drink the beer from the bottle, not the mug and make a pit stop before you go! Great food, dirt cheap!

Till next time when Carl threatens me to write another article.

..... Megan

What don't you want to hear?

Ever wonder what your customers think of you? How many of you spend countless hours trying to improve your business but never really take into consideration the end users point of view. Do really

think that price is the only deciding factor in determining whether you successfully obtain a particular contract or customer?

These are all good questions and certainly questions that you should ponder. As the competition gets more intense we all have to find ways to make our particular businesses unique. There are many ways to do this, but in this article I would like to focus on the first question presented, namely what your customer thinks of you.

I remember as a kid growing up in the business and spending my summers cleaning dishes in the kitchen. When I thought I had done a good job, I would go to my supervisor and ask "Are these OK". The reply I received, and the one that has always stuck with me was "Would you eat off them?" Nine times out of ten I'd go back and clean them again. This was my first lesson in learning that you have to put yourself on the other side of the fence and see things through your customers' eyes.

Now that I'm a little wiser and older, I realize when its time to retire a piece of equipment, not necessarily because it's fully depreciated, but it's not in the condition I would want to use if I were the customer. The last comment we want to hear from a customer is "Why is this not working" or "How come you rent out dirty equipment".

How many of you ask your customers when they return merchandise how there rental experience was? Do you sent out informal surveys asking for a rating on your products? Do you ask what can be done to make their experience better next time? Do you ask the customer if they feel they got their moneys worth? We have to remember that the best business is repeat business. Keeping your customers happy is the key to repeat business. Although there are those customers who, no matter what you do, will never be happy but at least we know we did our part. Sometimes all that is necessary is just taking the time to listen to them.

In January of this year our company took a very bold step, we actually hired one of our corporate customers to work for us as our outside sales manager on a full time basis. Not only had she had dealings with us but, as part of her job as an event coordinator, she worked with numerous rental stores and event service companies. The knowledge we gained from her has allowed us to improve the rental experience for all our clients.

We learned much about what a customer wants from a rental store. You will be surprised what your customers will tell you. It's important that you learn all aspects involved in the transaction starting with the initial phone call all the way to the return of the equipment. There are so many simple little things you can do as a rental store to improve your relationships with your customers. Believe it or not, one of the items on that list is not lowering your prices.

How many of you have staff meetings on a regular basis? Here is a challenge for you, invite one of your clients to your next staff meeting. I guarantee you, not only will they be thrilled to participate, you will gain some insight into your business and how its run.

I know many of you have your employees call up other rental stores to check on rates for equipment. Is this really important and what will your reaction be when you get this information? Do you ever check on store hours, or procedures to be done if the store is closed and there is a problem? Have you inquired on policies when the customer is not satisfied with the rental? These are things you should find out.

I hope I have given everyone one of you something to focus on. Listening to your customers should be a top priority for your success.

If you want to learn more about what your customers think, I strongly suggest you attend our October rental meeting; we will be having two key speakers one on the event services end and one on the equipment contractor end. You will be enlightened by their comments. So every one of you come to the next meeting to listen to

What don't you want to hear.

Steve Kohn

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

August 21st - VENDORS NIGHT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! At A-1 Tablecloth in Hackensack, NJ. See details page 5, directions below.

October 16th - Regular Meeting at Pioneer Rental - a fascinating program to make you aware of what your customers expect from from a rental store..

November 13th - Board Meeting

RENT-A-SURGERY

I've written a book. It's short but informative. It is meant for the medically uninitiated and will be of service to the easily terrified. The title of my book is, "Same Day Surgery for Dummies." Long a believer in the *ignorance is bliss* school of medical knowledge for patients, I will subtitle it, "Everything an Outpatient Needs to Know but Would be Better Off Not Knowing."

A recent experience qualifies me to write on the subject. I've been a hospital patient several times in the past but never as an *outpatient*. An outpatient is one who is admitted to a hospital for less than life threatening surgery. It is sometimes referred to as *same day surgery* or *minor surgery* though nowhere is it ever defined whether the surgery is minor for the patient or minor for the surgeon. Why, though, if the surgery is deemed minor for the patient, would the hospital request a copy of his Living Will as they did.

Used to be when a person went to a hospital for pre-op testing he was admitted the day before surgery and remained overnight until he went *under the knife* (a frightening phrase) usually the next day. Modern practice, however, requires that you visit the hospital a few days prior to your "procedure." This allows hospital personnel to do their poking, bloodletting and other unspeakable pre-op things without requiring the patient to stay overnight. This is not for the patient's well being. It's meant, rather, to keep his insurance company from throwing a tantrum.

I have no argument with this. If nothing else, it fosters a sense of security because everyone is extra nice during pre-op. This leads one to believe that the surgery won't be at all as traumatic as had expected. The feeling of well being is enhanced during pre-op because your body is never completely separated from its clothing. My pre-op went so well, I actually began to look forward to the upcoming surgery.

I was duped.

Sure, it started out very well. We (my wife came along to insure I wouldn't be a no-show) were greeted by a valet parking attendant and I had been given a bright red Express Admittance card so I wouldn't have to wait in line. I had been instructed to leave my Mr. T jewelry at home and be prepared to doff any removable appendages (eyeglasses, teeth, etc.).

They directed us to the Same Day Surgery section - in the basement! This was the first hint I had that this might not be the lark I had been anticipating. My apprehension increased when my wife informed me that, when she was a practicing RN, the only procedures done in the basement were in the morgue.

Once there I was led to my "room." It had one solid wall. The other walls were made of not so solid curtains that had built-in hair triggers to allow them to snap open instantly when one was least prepared for visitors. There were eight "rooms" in my section. I overheard depressing pre-op instructions given to each of my section-mates and watched as they were wheeled off in the direction of the morgue.

Someone in a white coat appeared and insisted I sign a paper that absolved the entire world of liability should my surgery be less than successful - a possibility that had not previously even been hinted at. Later a nurse materialized, as if in a puff of smoke, through the (ha-ha) "privacy" curtain.

"Remove your clothes and put on this gown!" she bellowed. The hospital gown was a jigsaw puzzle of arm holes fabricated of a material so flimsy and translucent it could only have been ordered out of a *Victoria's Secret* catalog.

The nurse anticipated my next question.

"Yes, take off your underwear, too," she snapped.

"But they're only going to remove a polyp from my nose," I protested.

"Take 'em off," she commanded and turned to leave.

Undaunted, I asked, "Can I keep my socks on?"

She stopped in her tracks and said, "No, remove your socks too. You won't be doing any walking."

"But, why?" I insisted, desperately trying to hold onto some semblance of dignity.

"It's a prophylactic measure." She answered.

"Heavens to Betsy," I gasped, and raised my eyebrows quizzically to my wife.

"It means *for sanitary reasons*," she explained.

The nurse disappeared as suddenly as she had arrived so I yelled at the still rustling curtain, "WILL THE DOCTOR BE WEARING SOCKS?!"

There was no reply.

In short order I was put to sleep. I never saw my surgeon that day. I'm happy to report everything went

well and the patient looked lovely in his peek-a-boo gown.

I'd love to tell you more about the outpatient traumas exposed in my book but it's time to leave for my doctor's office. He's going to remove the packing he stuffed up my nose during the "procedure."

This time I'll check to see if *he's* prophylactic ally correct and is sock-less.

I am. I don't wear them anymore - for sanitary reasons..

The inflatables in New Jersey update ----- also known as; information you need to know but didn't want to hear. Howard Heller, Paul Neuworth and I attended a meeting with the director of the Department of Community Affairs in Trenton. It was educational and informative but not necessarily what we wanted to hear. There were several other inflatable owner-operators at the round table meeting. The meeting was called to help address concerns of inflatable owners about new regulations for amusement rides.

You may remember we were told at our June meeting that we would be consulted during the regulation writing process. Well, we weren't. All hope is not lost though, there is still time left to have your voices heard and get your opinions in and your concerns answered.

Here are some dates to start working toward: Wednesday the 7th at 9:30 AM the directors and engineers from Community Affairs are going to hold another meeting for inflatable owners. This will be an informal meeting to go over the regulations which will be put into the New Jersey Register on August 5th. Once in the New Jersey Register, questions, suggestions and opinions must be made in writing by either letter or e-mail (the addresses are at the end of this piece). The next date to be aware of, and I urge you all to get involved even if it's just by showing up to lend support, is September 20th. That Friday, the 20th, is the day we must show our resolve in force in Trenton for the public hearing. If you wish to make a statement other than by just your presence you will need to be pre-registered. I will be able to help you with that if you'd like. Anyone interested in making a statement for public record should meet with our legislative ad-hoc committee to co-ordinate what will be said by whom to show a unified resolve by the American Rental Association of NJ. The last date we must be aware of is October 5th. After October 5th it's all over but the shouting because public comment ends then - so act now.

The Department of Community Affairs – aren't they the ones in charge of safety? - so, what's the big deal? Well, download a copy of the proposed new regs. And start reading. These regulations are typical of a government agency taking a small issue, inflatable safety, and by bending science, engineering and bureaucracy coming up with over regulation. In other words, they're putting a full body cast on a paper cut – inflatables - while ignoring a broken foot – steel/wood major carnival rides. Like most government rules they started out good by trying to regulate the fly-by-night carnivals that breeze into town one day and out the next and pick up the stray operator who doesn't believe in insurance and is working out of his garage. Reading this you're probably saying, "Yea, go get those guys," and I agree. We ALL agree. We all have a vested interest in making Moonwalks safe. God forbid someone gets hurt; our jobs, our businesses, our way of life is on the line. We want safety, too. We don't need to be told by the government whether to use a 36" stake vs. a 40" stake because the manufacturers will tell us. They want the end user to be safe so we'll buy again next year because demand has grown. One part of the reg. used to say all inflatables have to be staked down; sounds fine, right? What about when you're working in a gymnasium. I don't believe schools would appreciate holes in the gym floor (we got them to change

this so now we can use sandbags).

Another example is the Type Certification test. All inflatables must have the manufacturer's engineering to be certified by the state's engineers to guard against manufacturers who don't do any engineering but, rather, buys an inflatable that was sown by Betsy in her backyard. You'd better believe that our manufacturers are going to feel free to pass the Type Certification fees on to us – and that's a fee for each different type of inflatable! All operators are going to be required to post the manufacturer's minimum height restrictions. Howard pointed out that some manufacturers do not have minimum height restrictions. The state's response was, "Fine, then there must be a sign posted that says that." Howard asked again, "So you want a sign that says there is no minimum?" the answer was, Yes." So, to clarify, we must post a sign that says there is nothing to say. "Yes, because the public has a right to be safe."

How about the fees? This is the part I got all fired up about and then beaten back down like the cur that I am. The state is raising their fees. Inflatables (Moonwalks and the like) are going from \$100 to \$200. That's a 100% increase next year. Are any on you out there raising your prices 100%? Fine, if you say the fees were too low last year; how about our friends with the super rides – the metal rides? Our friends with million dollar roller coasters are being raised too, to only \$600. To me this seems disproportionate, still, they didn't like any of the logic we at the meeting (especially me) used to indicate that we were being charged too much and the super-rides aren't being charged enough. We heard no good answer justifying their fee structure which seems based on a need for funding more than fairness and the amount of time required doing an inspection. I've been there when a state inspector has been by to inspect an inflatable. You unroll a Moonwalk and blow it up. The inspector walks around it, points here and there and, if it looks good, you're done. Fifteen minutes, 20 if you stop to schmooze. Logically, then, the Log-Flume and Twister at Great Adventure must take only 45 minutes to an hour to inspect. I don't think so....

This is how I see the fee schedule: If I purchase a \$3,000 bounce ride, my permit fee of \$200 is over 5% of the cost of the ride. Yet, if I purchase a roller coaster for \$1,000,000 my permit fee of \$600 is not even 1/2 of 1% of the cost of that ride. Keeping this in mind, if I keep the bounce ride for 5 years and continue to permit it, I will have to spend more than 1/3 the cost of the unit just in permits alone. While in the same time period my \$1,000,000 roller coaster, with all its moving parts, still has not cost me 1/2 of 1% for permits over the 5 year period.

My feeling is that the department feels that they will seek out and find all the unregistered RENTAL inflatables to make up their budget short fall – last year about \$600,000 – rather than charge the big rides a more proportionally fair fee. That's a lot of \$200 fees if you ask me.

To get involved, first go to the Department of Community Affairs web site: <http://www.nj.us/dca/codes/> - to look at or download the new proposed regs. Next contact me (Joe Mihalko,) Howard Heller or Paul Neuwirth of Taylor Rental, Berkeley Heights. Let's co-ordinate what we say and do. If you're a shoot from the hip type of person, first educate yourself then contact the man directly:

Richard Z. Osworth, phone 609-984-7974; FAX 609-984-7952 The best way to reach Mr.

Osworth is by e-mail: rosworth@dca.state.nj.us By snail mail, write to: **Mr. Richard Osworth State of NJ Department of Community Affairs**

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Most of all, plan now on attending the public hearing in Trenton on Friday September 20th. Let us know who's coming and book it now.

Joe Mihalko



ARA of NJ
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